



## SUCCESS STORY

### Zestful youth is youngest member of solid waste management team



*Mark Anthony Oral directs waste management activities at the dumpsite.*

When 16-year-old Mark Anthony Oral of Campostela in Cebu province was informed that an invitation to join the municipality's solid waste management technical working group (TWG) was sent to him by mistake -- the mayor's office thought he was the school's Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) president -- he decided to talk with the mayor to clarify things.

"Couldn't he be a member of the group to represent the concerns of the youth? Couldn't a teenager like him offer fresh ideas on how to tackle the solid waste management problem?" These were only two of the questions which Oral asked. Impressed by the student's enthusiasm to help out, Mayor James Cabatigan decided to have the young man in the TWG, instead of the PTA president, making Oral the youngest TWG member for solid waste management in the Visayas region, and possibly, in the whole country.

That decision made a lot of difference.

During classroom training on waste characterization, the TWG members were made to understand that actual waste analysis in the field would be done. That would mean TWG members -- many of whom had never been at a dumpsite before -- have to sift through the garbage collected from the markets, households and business establishments, not only for one or two days, but for the next seven days<sup>1</sup> to get a more accurate picture of the kind of waste the municipality generates. The whole training was part of Campostela's environmental governance initiative, assisted by the region's Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Environmental Management Bureau and the Philippine Environmental Governance Project which is supported by the United States Agency for International Development.

The mere idea of smelling the garbage's "aroma" and being at the dumpsite for a week with the municipality's waste around was an unwelcome thought for many of the TWG members. But not for Oral. If that was the requirement, he told himself, then it should be done. Sensing the hesitation of his teammates, Oral, along with the municipal planning coordinator and the municipal engineer, immediately briefed the mayor on the requirements and requested the local chief executive to have a heart-to-heart talk with all the TWG members to get their commitment to complete the seven-day waste characterization process. And to show his seriousness in being an active part of the team, Oral volunteered to take charge of the activities at the dumpsite.

"I felt I had to set an example, that's why I volunteered," said Oral, who enters fourth year high school at the University of the Visayas where he was elected president of the student council last school year. "I believe leaders have to practice what they preach for others to follow," added Oral who hopes to become a lawyer someday.

At the dumpsite, Oral's intensity to finish the job infected the other TWG members. Oftentimes, they start work at 8 a.m., examine the garbage under the scorching sun, and would only stop at 6 or 7 p.m. They did not lose their focus even when a fire gutted a nearby building. The group's energy level did not diminish until the work was completed.

"It was quite an experience," Oral said, referring to the recently concluded activity. "It was really worth our while, considering that we couldn't prepare a good solid waste management plan without going through a very thorough waste characterization process." He also said that he would share this experience with fellow students at school and be an active champion of reducing, reusing and recycling waste.